

The Open Mike^{District 2}

A Newsletter From Councilman **Mike Knapp**

Volume 1, Number 9

December 2005

A Look Back at 2005

The Year In Review

We've made it through another year – and what a year it's been. Back in January 2005, we had a county budget that exceeded the charter limit, an Agricultural Reserve being eyed for possible water and sewer extension, and the community of Clarksburg was still just a rapidly growing area few had heard of outside of the Upcounty. Twelve months later, we've got a county budget that responsibly meets the charter limit, an Agricultural Reserve with additional protection, and Clarksburg ... well, Clarksburg has helped us begin to better define the parameters of planning and permitting in the Upcounty and beyond.



Councilmember Mike Knapp

And that's just the *beginning* of the list.

It's been a productive year, and I'm pleased to have played a major role in many of the County Council's most significant actions this year, from introducing the first resolution calling for a more accountable and fiscally responsible county budget, to drafting the first comprehensive proposals restricting Private Institutional Facilities (PIFs) in the Agricultural Reserve.

While there is more that can be done – I *always* believe there is more work to be done – I'm pleased with the progress I've been able to make this past year to address many of the most pressing issues facing both the Upcounty and all of Montgomery County.

Each year, I set myself a number of broad goals to help me better determine the most pressing issues facing our county, and then work to address them more effectively. Whether it's working to strengthen [Public Safety](#), provide more alternatives for [Economic Opportunity](#), fighting to ensure [Fiscal Responsibility and Accountability](#) in government, advocating for

responsible management and promotion of our County's [Agriculture and Environment](#), investing in one of the best [Education](#) systems in the United States, or working to improve my own [Community Outreach and Advocacy](#), here's a look back at what I've done in 2005, working on your behalf, to make our county a better place to live, work, and play:

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Fiscal Responsibility and Accountability

You work hard for your money – and you want to make sure your money works hard for you. Every month, you've got to make sure your checkbook balances and that you don't spend beyond your means. That means you've got to determine what you can and can't live without – in other words, you've got to set your priorities. It's a tough, but responsible, approach to managing your funds – and it's time your county government took the same approach with your tax dollars.

Setting Programmatic and Budget Priorities

That's why, on February 1, 2005, [I introduced Resolution 15-904](#) requiring the County to establish annual budget priorities and performance measures across government. The motivation behind my resolution was clearly stated in the resolution's second clause:

the majority of funding that is appropriated by the Council comes from the taxpayers of Montgomery County, and in exercising this budget authority, the Council is accountable to County taxpayers and must ensure that funding priorities are clear and that the programs it funds are cost-effective.

This is your money the county is spending; I believe you're entitled to know what you're getting for it. For this reason, my resolution, which the Council approved unanimously, required the County Council to establish annual budget priorities by October of each year -- and this past October, we did just that, [adopting a set of countywide budget priorities for the FY 2007 budget](#).

As part of this process, we required County agencies to identify their own budget priorities, provide information on the cost-effectiveness of their programs, provide performance measures on their programs, and link future budget requests to these performance measures. As a result, the Council received [Office of Legislative Oversight Report 2006-2, Legislative Uses of Performance Measures in Budget Decision-Making](#), in December 2005. This report will help the Council ensure that when it makes decisions regarding the funding of programs, it has thoughtful and up-to-date information on what the program was established to accomplish and whether it actually performed as expected. This will allow us to make decisions on, and invest in, programs based on real data, not just gut reaction.

"...the charter limit isn't an arbitrary number; it reflects government's ability to live within its means."

Proving the Point: Two Approaches to a Charter Limit Budget

While the Council may have unanimously adopted my resolution on budget priorities, there was still considerable skepticism that, even if we established government-wide priorities, we could ever come up with a budget that fell within the charter limit. To you as a resident and taxpayer, the charter limit isn't an arbitrary number; it reflects government's ability to live within its means. Yet, there was concern that living within the charter limit would mean the county would have to cut back on its most critical services. I knew that it would be possible to increase spending – in some cases dramatically – so long as those increases were made thoughtfully and responsibly.

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On May 5, [I introduced two budget proposals to fund government at the charter limit](#). Both of my proposals showed that it was possible to fund government at the charter limit without cutting services, and while still providing both tax relief and targeted increases in areas such as public safety, education, and employee contracts. The underlying philosophy of my proposals was, quite simply, that it was possible to increase funding within the charter limit if the council would determine what it considered to be its budget priorities.

Living Within Our Means – At Last

On May 26, the County Council [approved a \\$3.5 billion county budget which stayed within the charter limit](#) for the first time in years. It also marked the first time in years that the Council approved a budget that was lower than the original budget recommendation submitted to the Council by the County Executive. This budget provided homeowners with some much-needed tax relief, while increasing our investment in critical services and programs.

We've begun work on the FY2007 county budget, and are reviewing the priorities and performance measures submitted to us by county agencies. We're also listening intently to your recommendations and suggestions as we put together the budget for the coming year. Keep on [sending me your comments](#) so I can ensure you get what you expect from your government.

Public Safety



Councilmember Knapp serves as the Chairman of the Council's Homeland Security Committee.

As Chairman of the Homeland Security Committee (HSC) – and as the lead member for Fire and Rescue on the Public Safety Committee – working to ensure your safety and well-being is a major part of my day. I'm committed to ensuring we continue to invest in police, fire, and first responders, and that we take the necessary action to ensure our county is adequately prepared in the event the unexpected occurs.

Be Prepared

I take very seriously the ability of our county to **prepare for a disaster**. The HSC receives regular updates from Gordon Aoyagi, the Director of [Homeland Security Department](#), to continually evaluate – and re-evaluate – how

the county might respond in the face of a disaster, whether that disaster comes from a terrorist attack or a severe ice storm.

But I want to [make sure you're prepared as well](#). In the event of an ice storm, for example, could you self-sustain for three days – meaning you have enough food, water, heat, and power – until the county can reach you to provide assistance? The county is working to provide residents with the information you need so you can sustain yourself, your family, and even your pets, for 72 hours.

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Gang Prevention

While Montgomery County has, for the most part, a low crime rate, we have been unable to escape the unfortunate scourge of gang activity. Responding to a number of gang-related

incidents at county high schools, I cosponsored a [community forum on gang awareness and prevention](#) on October 5 at [Watkins Mill High School](#). Bringing together advocates, members of the public, students, and government leaders, we explored different ways to provide young people with alternatives to gang membership as well as how government and communities can support at-risk youth interested in overcoming, or escaping from, the lure of gangs. Working with leaders in [Montgomery Village](#), we are presently looking into options for bringing the [SHARP Suspension Program](#) to the community as one way of addressing gang prevention.

Investing in Police

The FY 2006 budget included **\$182 million for the [Montgomery County Police Department](#)**, an increase of 11 percent over the previous year. This funding will be put to use to meet the growing needs of the Upcounty, including the addition of new personnel, which will increase staffing for specialized teams, such as Special Assignment Teams, within the Sixth District. This increased investment will also allow the county to invest in its educational officer program, and to move forward with the construction of a new and expanded Sixth District police station, replacing the old facility on Route 355. We also opened the Olney police substation this year, which is welcome news to the very patient members of the Olney community.

The Clarksburg Fire Station Opens...

A much-needed interim **Fire Station officially opened at Gateway Center Drive in Clarksburg** on November 20. As someone who has been pushing to open this station as quickly as possible, I'm very pleased we were able to get an interim site approved and open so rapidly. Plus, opening an interim station helps us avoid the need to first establish temporary services at a temporary facility, then move them to an interim site, then move them *again* once the permanent facility is completed. This way, we'll only have to move our station one more time. The complement of personnel and equipment -- it's the first station anywhere in the county to have a four person staff of firefighters on one engine -- will meet the fire and rescue needs of the growing Clarksburg community and its surrounding area.

..and We're Working On Three More

While I'm very pleased with the success we've had with the Clarksburg Fire Station, we need to **accelerate the build-out of other fire stations in the Upcounty**. I'm working with agency officials to see how quickly we can complete the Germantown



As the lead member for Fire and Rescue Services on the Public Safety Committee, Councilmember Knapp continually works to upgrade fire apparatus and equipment for county fire and rescue workers.

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East, Germantown West, and Travilah stations in the Upcounty area, all of which are in varying stages of development. The Travilah station is scheduled to open in concert with a newly-updated training facility.

Investing in Fire Equipment and Apparatus

An increase of \$18 million in its FY 2006 budget will allow [Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service](#) to continue to **upgrade its apparatus and equipment**. The Fire Chief has been asked to regularly inform the council directly of MCFRS's apparatus needs, and we're continuing to support his maintenance plan to ensure MCFRS will have the most up-to-date equipment available to do its job right.

Agriculture and Environment

As the Councilmember representing the vast majority of Montgomery County's 93,000 acre [Agricultural Reserve](#), I feel a personal responsibility to serve as a steward for this precious resource. It's important to remember that protecting the Agricultural Reserve is about preserving farming in a county where farming has been a way of life for generations, as well as ensuring we maintain a cleaner environment and protect our open space. Montgomery County's diverse agricultural industry has 577 farms and 350 horticultural enterprises, which contribute \$250 million annually to our local economy. Therefore, we must be certain that the policies we enact to protect the reserve do not inhibit responsible farming within its boundaries. This past year, we've taken a number of steps to fortify the Agricultural Reserve, ensuring this precious resource can continue to be utilized and enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.



Councilmember Knapp has led the effort to reform PIF policies and prohibit the extension of water and sewer into the Ag Reserve.

Celebrating 25 Years of the Ag Reserve

It's been my privilege to represent and advocate for the Ag Reserve throughout the year. In March, I was pleased to mark the **25th anniversary of the Ag Reserve** by hosting an event at the [Agricultural History Farm Park](#), where I helped preview a number of new county initiatives to strengthen agriculture in the County, including support for farmers, updating land use policies, and increasing a focus on education and marketing programs. In June, I presented at a state summit sponsored by Maryland Department of Agriculture to **discuss and promote our county's progressive agricultural reserve policies** with other Maryland counties looking to us as an example of how to wisely manage open spaces. Finally, the year of celebration culminated in a **celebration event** at [Butler's Orchard](#) in October, where I had the

pleasure of speaking -- and eating! -- with families from across the County.

Dough, A Deer

According to County farmers, the greatest challenge to their economic survival is crop damage from the overpopulation of deer. For this reason, I am pleased the FY2006 proposed budget contained **an increase of \$50,000 for additional deer management programs**. I testified

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before the Maryland General Assembly – along with many others in our agricultural community -- in **support of legislation to extend the hunting season** by two additional Sundays in an expanded effort to curtail the surplus deer population. This month, I also introduced legislation calling for [new firearms regulations](#) to keep our county regulations consistent with those at the state level, while still providing farmers with the flexibility they need to manage deer.

Rethinking PIF Policies

The largest issue affecting the integrity of the Ag Reserve this year involved Private Institutional Facilities (PIFs). Under current statute, PIFs – which are non-profit organizations like churches, schools, or child care centers – are allowed some flexibility for development in any zone in the county, including within the Ag Reserve. By mid-Summer, the County Council had before it at least four applications from PIFs to extend water and sewer into the Ag Reserve. In response, the Council strengthened its current policies regarding PIFs by establishing an explicit policy that [water and sewer will not be extended into the Ag Reserve](#).

Refining Land Use Policies

I have proposed a number of other [adjustments to our land use policies](#) that I hope will clarify and strengthen many of our laws involving the Ag Reserve. Specifically, I am calling for further incentives for Ag easements, the creation of PIF development incentives and other zoning modifications to allow PIFs to grow near or within their home communities, and clarification of the multi-use septic systems compatible with RDT zoning.

Broadcast News

In December, the Council approved legislation I introduced with Councilmember Praisner to [limit the height of television and radio transmission towers](#) to 275 feet, with a foot-for-foot setback. In fact, this height restriction and set-back requirement applies not only to the Ag Reserve, but to all zones in the county. This legislation will help us ensure that the county keeps its scenic vistas from being overwhelmed by antennas. ([See the full story below.](#))

The Council also approved [Bill 8-05, regarding a new Posting of Notice Issuance for Building Permits](#). This bill requires the recipient of a building permit for certain structures in residential or agricultural zones to post a sign describing the proposed construction and the deadline for filing an administrative appeal. Under current law, property owners are permitted to erect certain accessory structures -- such as antennas -- on their property by obtaining a permit, but there is no requirement that any notice of the permit or of the availability of appeal rights be posted. As a result, property owners are not always aware that structures will be constructed on neighboring property, and that they may have the right to appeal the permit.

Education

As a member of the Council's Education Committee, I have the responsibility for – and the pleasure of – overseeing one of the best school systems in the nation. We on the committee work closely with Dr. Jerry Weast, our county's [Superintendent of Schools](#), Dr. Charlene Nunley of [Montgomery College](#), and the [Montgomery County Board of Education](#) to ensure our education system remains dynamic, competitive, accountable, and of the highest quality.

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Investing in K-12 Education...and Beyond

It's with good reason that funding for education makes up half of our county's \$3.5 billion annual budget -- our K-12 system is the backbone of Montgomery County. With the \$1.7 billion contained in the county budget for education, we were able to **expand all-day kindergarten, reduce class sizes, and add new assistant principals**. In fact, we have accelerated our all-day kindergarten initiative so it will be in all Montgomery County public schools by the next school year.

The FY2006 budget also included **full funding for the county's obligations to Montgomery College**, including the funding needed to expand the College Institute Program. We're also continuing to work with the private sector to expand higher education resources and academic-based research activities.

New and Better School Facilities

We're also continuing our commitment to **school modernization and construction**. We invested almost a billion dollars in school construction and renovation in FY2006, and I anticipate this investment will only continue in the coming years. In the Upcounty alone, we're in the process of adding 35 classrooms at [Northwest High School](#), building a new elementary school in Germantown, and working on a new elementary school and a high school in Clarksburg, both of which are scheduled to open in September 2006.

"Go, little book..."

We've continued our [investment in libraries](#), including providing the funding needed for acquisitions at the [Germantown](#) and [Rockville](#) libraries. Additionally, I've been pushing for county government to complete the [new library at Germantown](#) as quickly as possible; in fact, I've made such a pest of myself that the project has finally been put under the direct responsibility of the County's Chief Administrative Officer, who has organized a number of meetings with DPWT and the community to keep interested residents up to date on the progress of the library. Keep watching *The Open Mike* for updates.

On a related note, I have been pleased to use the libraries around the Upcounty as a location for most of my [Open Mike meetings](#). Libraries remain one of our great resources in the county, and it is always a pleasure to visit county residents in such a welcoming setting.

Providing More Alternatives for Child Care

The Council approved my amendment to invest in a pilot program to examine alternatives to create more community-based child care providers. This would provide parents with access to

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As a member of the Education Committee, Councilmember Knapp is a strong advocate for a rigorous and accountable education system.

independent, high quality, academically-rigorous child care programs. The pilot program is presently administered by [Centro Familia](#), and I am pleased with what we've seen so far.

Economic Opportunity

One of the most important parts of my job is making sure that all residents have the opportunities to achieve their dreams and aspirations, and to help both themselves and our community to grow and thrive. But "economic opportunity" means more than just ensuring there are jobs available and well-educated citizens to take them; it means making sure people have the opportunity to live, work, play, enjoy and travel around our county. Transportation, health care, community planning ... these all contribute to the well-being of our county and to the well-being of our citizens.

Increasing Transit Options and Improving Our Infrastructure

While the county has historically been eager to approve new developments and housing throughout the county, it has not always had similar foresight to ensure adequate transportation to and from these areas. While the county policy is to encourage development along major transportation corridors, such as the I-270, we still face the challenges of moving people from the major corridors into their communities. Development of new roads has not kept pace with the development of new neighborhoods; meanwhile, existing roads need continual care and maintenance.

The Council **increased its investment in transportation infrastructure** by 33% in FY 2006; we'll continue to follow through on that commitment in the upcoming capital budget. I have also continued to advocate for increases in our investment in county infrastructure to ensure we not only begin to build and complete the roads that have been on Montgomery County's master plans for decades, but also so we can continue the upkeep of our existing roads. [The Road Scholar](#) section of *The Open Mike* is just one way you can reach me to let me know of roads that need repairing or where we can increase the safety at intersections.

"...one of my main tasks in the coming year will be to develop strategies to provide a dedicated source of funding for Metro."

While it can take time and effort for Upcounty residents to reach the nearest Metro station, [Metro](#) remains a valuable and popular mode of transportation in Montgomery County. As the incoming chairman of the [Transportation Planning Board \(TPB\)](#) – the federally-mandated body responsible for transportation planning for the entire Greater Washington Metropolitan region – one of my main tasks in the coming year will be to develop strategies to [provide a dedicated source of funding for Metro](#). This will involve careful work with all the affected jurisdictions, which makes this effort a genuine challenge. I'll keep you posted.

I'll also continue to **advocate strongly for the** [Corridor Cities Transitway](#), a proposed light rail system that would run from Shady Grove to the Upcounty region. That's an unrealized initiative

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I'm working on, but it's equally as important that we keep the current transit alternatives we have. That's why I'm **fighting to keep existing transit alternatives, such as the MARC stations in Boyds and Dickerson** ([see the story below for more information](#)).



Councilmember Knapp is fighting to ensure county residents have a variety of transit options available.

to ensure that the final master plan does just what we envision it to do, and that it has the infrastructure staging requirements to make the plan work as it should. We as a council need to obtain more information and a better understanding of some of the major issues – such as the relocation of the county services park, for example – before committing to a plan that will guide us, and the Shady Grove community, for the next twenty years.

Olney Advances, Shady Grove Considered

On a similar note, the Council this year **approved the [Olney Master Plan](#)**. The Olney plan reflects the nature of the Olney of the community and provides the community with the guidance needed to continue to build a stronger sense of community. To this end, I inserted language in the Master Plan to establish an Olney Town Center Citizen Advisory Group to make certain the community can play a strong role in creating the vision of their own town center – and then ensuring that vision is effectively implemented. It is this standard – ensuring the master plan reflects the personality of the community and gives it the tools to expand in a similar manner – that I believe must be adhered to as we consider and approve master plans for other communities.

I still have reservations regarding a number of key issues involving the still-unapproved [Shady Grove Master Plan](#). I am continuing to gather the information and assurances I need

Adventist Emergency Facility Comes to the Upcounty

One of the major emergency facilities currently serving our area, [Shady Grove Hospital](#), has the second busiest Emergency Room in the state – and the Upcounty is only increasing the demands on the facility. Upcounty residents requiring care will have both a long drive to Shady Grove, and then may have a long wait once they get there. Fortunately, help is now on the way.

In October 2004, I [introduced a resolution](#) – which was unanimously approved by the council – restating the critical need for an emergency facility in the Upcounty, and urging the state legislature and governor to do what was necessary to locate a facility in the Upcounty region. In February, I traveled to Annapolis with other residents and safety employees to [testify and lobby support](#) for legislative efforts to bring the emergency facility to the Upcounty. With the help of our state delegation – especially [Senator Hogan](#) and Delegate Hurson – we successfully overcame the hurdles necessary to proceed with the **opening of the Adventist Emergency Care Facility in Germantown**. If all goes well, the facility should formally open in May 2006.

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Veni, Vidi, Verizon

Sometimes, you get surprised by the issue that causes your constituents the most heartburn. While Clarksburg may have generated more headlines, nothing generated more outrage, frustration, and teeth-gnashing among Upcounty residents than did [Verizon](#) as it worked to expand its cabling and wiring in the county. After weeks and months of torn up yards, extended power outages, and exposed wires, residents eventually had had enough – and so had I.

In late September, I admonished Verizon for its lack of planning and poor service – especially for its failures to notify residents that work would be taking place in their neighborhoods, and that there may be periods of mess or loss of power. Since then, there has been some improvement, as you'll see from the story below. I applaud this initiative, and hope that Verizon will continue to improve its relations with the community. Naturally, I know you'll let me know if problems occur.

Community Advocacy and Outreach

Clarksburg

Clarksburg. It's become the one-word reminder of a planning and permitting process that is systematically broken, across all levels of government. As I noted over the Summer:

the issues that exist is the credibility of Montgomery County's planning process, and most specifically the implementation and enforcement of that process. The Planning Board, the County Council, and most importantly, the residents of our communities spent an amazing amount of time participating in the development of our Master Plans with the expectation that these plans will guide what ultimately is placed on the ground. There is now a perception as a result of the issues in Clarksburg that what is in the Master Plan is not being followed, and as a result that these issues may not be confined to just Clarksburg.

I've worked with the Clarksburg community over the last year and a half to identify the problems that have arisen as a result of Clarksburg's development. While issues involving the planning process have received a great deal of attention in the media, we have other, lesser known, but just as critical issues to deal with involving public infrastructure and coordinating transportation and public safety.

The Council took a strong step forward by requesting that [the Office of Legislative Oversight \(OLO\) undertake a fact-finding review of the Clarksburg Town Center project](#) to determine what had gone awry and what was needed to remedy the situation. The OLO's comprehensive report was delivered to the Council on November 8. If you're interested in the Clarksburg issue, and haven't yet read the report, I encourage you to do so. Over the last year, I've been advocating for increased coordination among county agencies and departments to ensure a more cohesive approach to meeting the area's transportation needs.

I've also worked – successfully – to get the Clarksburg Fire Station operational this year, and have been a constant advocate for an Assistant Chief Administrative Officer in County government to ensure coordination among county departments and due diligence by county government on behalf of the Clarksburg community. The Council is presently considering a [number of legislative proposals and other policy changes](#) to **improve the planning and permitting process across the county**; increased communication with residents is vital to any effort to address the shortcomings revealed in the OLO report.

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More important, however, I believe we owe it to the Clarksburg community – and other communities undergoing growing pains, such as those in Shady Grove or Olney – to ensure their community is developed and built in a manner that reflects its original vision and makes the community a great place to live.

The Open Mike

I'm grateful that I can always count on you to let me know what issues are important to you, and I appreciate the comments, suggestions, and advice I've received throughout the year. The Open Mike meetings I've held throughout the Upcounty over the past six months have been informative, useful, and just plain fun, and I'll be holding more in 2006.



Councilmember Knapp listens to Boyds residents at an Open Mike meeting in October.

This [newsletter](#) is another initiative of this past year that I'm very proud of. I launched *The Open Mike* nine months ago to a respectable mailing list that has now nearly doubled in size. *The Open Mike* is always a work in progress, and your suggestions and feedback have been valuable in making it a more useful, informative publication. I anticipate it'll only continue to get better in the coming year.

Final Thoughts

Looking through the last nine month's worth of *The Open Mike*, I'm pleased with what we – meaning me and you, because you play a pivotal role in this -- have been able to accomplish this year. But there's always more to be done. In the coming months, the Council will continue to work on the Shady Grove and Damascus Master Plans, address the shortcomings in planning and permitting that led to the Clarksburg problems, further refine our land use policies, and dive into the FY2007 budget with a new zeal.

While the County Council has formally adjourned for the year, **we'll be back in session again on Tuesday, January 18**. As always, let me know what you think of what we're doing and how I can ensure your voice is heard on the Council.

Have a happy and safe holiday season – and I'll see you back here in 2006!

Mike

Mike Knapp
Councilmember

Knapp Fights to Keep Boyds, Dickerson MARC Stations Open

I was very disappointed to learn of the [Maryland Transit Authority's](#) (MTA) recommendation to close the Boyds and Dickerson [MARC](#) stations in the Upcounty area. It was extremely frustrating to me not only that MTA chose not to consult with anyone in county government – either in the executive or legislative branch -- before it made this decision, but also that the county was never formally notified of MTA's final recommendation. We in the County government learned of the decision in much the same way as the rest of the citizens of the county – through the media and through the grapevine. Had MTA consulted with the county, we might have been able to address any perceived shortcomings.



Boyds Station, circa 1890.

We are very fortunate that our county has been served by rail service for almost as long as railroads have been around. In fact, both Dickerson and Boyds have a history of railroad service dating back to the 1880s, when both towns were served by elegant brick and slate stations. Trains have been moving passengers back and forth between the city of Washington and the farmlands of Dickerson for more than a hundred years; the train station in Boyds was the dropping-off point for the rock that was hauled into the Upcounty so we could build some of the first roads in our area in the early 1900s.

History aside, as the Upcounty region continues to grow in population, it is imperative that we provide residents with more transit options for our residents to move in and around the county, not less. The MARC trains have long provided countless county residents with a solution to the crush of traffic that so often clogs our roads, pollutes our air, and generally makes commuting a nightmare. I heard from one resident in the Damascus area, for example, who takes the MARC daily from Boyds down to Rockville – not a lengthy trip by any stretch, but that's one less driver on the road every day. More than 5,500 commuters take the MARC each day; logic would seem to dictate that we should continue to encourage and promote increased ridership on MARC. Incredibly, though, MTA is recommending eliminating two of six stops in the Upcounty.

It is my understanding that MTA has cited the costs of installing vending ticket machines at these stops as the impetus behind their recommended closure. Had the county been consulted, we could have informed MTA that vending machines are really not necessary at these stations, since the majority of riders at these stops already purchase their tickets elsewhere – just as they have for more than 20 years. I believe we could have worked together at that time to reach a compromise that would have negated the perceived need to close these stations.

Further, Montgomery County already makes a significant investment in these stops. The county operates these two stations and – as Councilmember Nancy Floreen and I pointed out in a December 12 letter to MTA, we have made substantial investments in their capital, operations, and maintenance over the years, even helping to rebuild the Dickerson station after a 1982 fire. The county has proven its commitment to MTA and MARC; I would hope that MTA would live up to its commitment to the county.

Finally, as the Councilmember representing the majority of Montgomery County's 93,000 acre Agricultural Reserve, I take very seriously the responsibility of ensuring we preserve our open

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space. That means reducing the demand for roads through open spaces or butted up against the reserve, just to move our residents from one area to another. Mass transit is one of the best ways to reduce the wear and tear on the Ag Reserve and other open spaces. MARC provides residents with an incredibly convenient, effective and comfortable way to help us continue our responsible stewardship of the ag reserve.

On December 13, the County Council unanimously approved a resolution that Councilmember Floreen and I authored to express our opposition to the MTA's recommendation. As I said when we introduced our resolution, limiting the number of MARC stations serving the Upcounty would be an enormous disservice to our residents. There are currently six MARC stations serving the Upcounty and its residents. The county needs them all – not just four of them – if we are to offer commuters real options for getting back and forth.

...limiting the number of MARC stations serving the Upcounty would be an enormous disservice to our residents.

*The public hearing originally scheduled by MTA for December 15 in Barnesville has been rescheduled for **Thursday, January 5, 2006, from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.** The hearing will take place at The Pavilion Behind St. Mary's Catholic Shrine, 18230 Barnesville Road (MD Route 117) Barnesville, Maryland.. For more information, please call: MTA information agents, Monday - Friday 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at 410-539-500, or 1-800-325-RAIL. TTY for people who are hearing and/or speech impaired (Baltimore) 410-333-2354. Or, go the MTA website at www.mtmaryland.com. The location is accessible to persons with disabilities. If anyone requires special accommodations, please call Mr. Glenn Litsinger, Manager MTA Customer Service at 410-767-8358 At least one week prior to the hearing.*

Council Approves Knapp Bill Limiting Tower Heights



On December 6, the County Council approved Zoning Text Amendment 05-10, which I introduced with Councilmember Praisner to limit the height of radio and television transmission towers in Montgomery County to 275 feet. There is also a foot-for-foot setback requirement, meaning a tower of 105 feet in height, for example, must be setback from the perimeter line of the property by 105 feet.

Councilmember Praisner and I removed a similar foot-for-foot setback requirement for amateur radio broadcast towers (such as those serving ham radio operators), after discussing the issues with a number of ham radio operators around the county.

I'm pleased the Council approved my amendment, and I am especially grateful to the various citizens' groups in the county who played an active role in helping us craft this ZTA and steer it to final passage.

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Verizon Construction Updates Available Online

As readers of *The Open Mike* know, I've been very frustrated with Verizon during its efforts to upgrade its network. Power outages, ruined yards, and unpredictable work times have caused considerable heartburn among Upcounty residents; [I've done my share of complaining about this](#) as well, and have pushed for Verizon to improve its customer service and better inform residents of its work activities.



I am pleased to learn that Verizon has made information available on its website to let residents know when and where it is scheduled to install buried fiber optic cable. While this in itself may not reduce any unfortunate power outages or the number of damaged yards, it at least will let residents know that work will be occurring in their area -- something that was a major sore spot for many of us caught unaware by a parked truck closing off a lane of traffic in our neighborhood.

The web page Verizon has set up can be somewhat difficult to find, so rather than look for it over on the [Verizon website](#), you might want to just [click here](#), then bookmark it.

My thanks to Verizon for making this information available; it's a start, and I believe in starts. But let me know what you think.

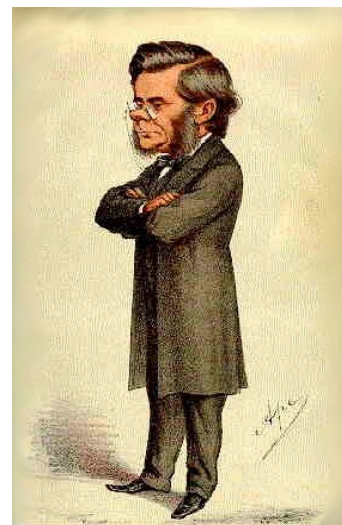
The Upcounty Road Scholar

Skylark Road Open; No Signal for Ridge at Sweepstakes

Got a road that needs repairing? A traffic light that's out? Is there a street or intersection that you think needs a stop sign or crosswalk? One of my responsibilities is to make sure someone knows about it -- and to do what I can to get you information on your question or request as quickly as possible.

I stay in regular contact with the [Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation](#) (DPWT) and the [Maryland State Highway Administration](#) (MSHA), and provide each agency with a list of projects that need addressing in the Upcounty. Both agencies receive countless requests each week, and getting a response back can take some time. So bear with me -- if you don't see a particular project listed here, that doesn't mean it has been forgotten or neglected, but rather that I haven't received an updated report on its progress this month.

With this in mind, the Road Scholar section of the newsletter provides an opportunity to give you the latest information received from DPWT, MSHA, and others on the progress of requests that



The Road Scholar

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have been submitted on your behalf. It's also an opportunity for you to [let me know](#) of other projects that may need to be undertaken in your community.

Montgomery County Department of Public Works Update

Skylark Road (Clarksburg): Skylark Road has been striped and is now open for thru-traffic. My thanks to DPS and DPWT for getting this road completed and opened so quickly.

Maryland State Highways Administration Update

MD 27 (Ridge Road) at Sweepstakes Road (Valley Park/Damascus): I asked MSHA to consider locating a traffic signal at this intersection to help make it easier and safer for drivers going south on Ridge to turn left onto Sweepstakes Road. Here's the response I received from MSHA:

"My traffic engineering staff has completed a review and we would like to share our findings with you. The SHA follows the nationally accepted ["Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices"](#) (MUTCD) as the guide for when and how various traffic control devices should be installed. The guidelines for warranting a left-turn signal include traffic volume, vehicle delay, and collision history. A turning movement count was performed at this location in September 2005 when school came back in session. The data from that count revealed the left-turn volume from southbound MD 27, when used in a cross product with the opposing northbound traffic, did not meet the warrant. To assess delay at this intersection, a queuing analysis was performed for the southbound left-turn movement. Results from this study indicated that queued vehicles were able to clear the intersection in the same signal cycle. Police reported collisions at this intersection did not indicate a pattern that would characterize the need for a left-turn signal. Therefore, we cannot follow through with your request for a left-turn signal at this location, at this time."

DPWT Launches One-Stop Call Center for Easy Access to Most Services

The Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) recently announced the launch of a new consolidated customer service center to provide county residents with a single phone number to access most DPWT services. **The new phone number is (240) 777-6000**, and is available Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.

Questions, concerns or requests for highway maintenance, traffic and some parking issues will all be handled through the new service center. Services will also be available for **potholes, sidewalks, road resurfacing and paving, tree maintenance, mowing, storm drainage, leaf vacuuming, snow removal, traffic signals and signs, streetlights, street name signs, lane markings and crosswalks, traffic calming measures, subdivision development plan review, parking policies, and the parking lot districts.**

"With so many different programs and services in separate locations," DPWT Director Art Holmes said, "it is critical that we make it easier for residents to find and obtain the services that they need." The Road Scholar agrees, and urges residents to give the new service line a try -- then [drop me a line](#) or call me and let me know how well it works.

Vox Pops**Voices From Around the Upcounty Community**

"I think it is time to disband the MNCPPC and bring those planning functions within the county government. Enormous savings could be realized by disbanding this 'shadow government' which is not accountable to the public. The fact is that we don't need this extra bureaucracy. I know that it was set up by the state as a bi-county agency, but this was at a time when the two counties were young and did not have effective planning tools. What is the main reason for keeping this organization now?" – *Bob*



"I support your objectives on PIF Policy Reform. I am an active member of Church of the Redeemer in Gaithersburg. Our leadership is lobbying against the zoning/policy changes that would restrict church growth. For one thing, I don't see how moving a congregation ten or twenty miles out into the country so they can have a bigger auditorium and parking lot is going to increase the benefit of that church to the county. Such a move actually isolates the church resources from the people they seek to serve, that is, until their presence in

the previously undeveloped area leads to the expansion of the burbs into their new neighborhood. I think the community service argument is a smoke screen that covers up the basic motivation for these churches, which can be summed up in the slogan, "a bigger facility means better service". I disagree with that assumption, so I oppose the objective these churches have to encroach on undeveloped land. It's a well worn cliché, but it's still true: 'if you build it (i.e. sewer), they (the developers) will come.'" -- *Bill*

"As an avid fan of motorsports and an amateur race driver myself, I had been frustrated that Comcast does not carry 'Speed' channel in Montgomery County. After several years of tolerating this anomaly, I finally gave up and switched to satellite TV. However, I've had a cable modem for the Internet for years...even before it went digital. The service had never been all that bad...occasional outages of a day or two. However, this summer when a storm hit, my cable was out for 5 weeks before they finally fixed my problem... and it was painful. I made numerous phone calls, took lots of time off of work to meet techs, multiple complaints to the County, etc. There was nothing wrong in my house. It was all in the pole connections, splices, etc., getting to my house and apparently my neighbors as well. Yet it took about 5 service calls by different people every time to finally get it fixed. Even more infuriating was the situation where the contracted techs would say, yes I have a problem, it's in the cable and they would have a cable crew right out to fix it. Days later I'd call Comcast and they would say my case was referred to a supervisor who would respond within a few days!" – *Tyler*

"Just read the letter from Tom in your latest issue about his trouble with getting Comcast to bury his cable -- I, too, have been trying (without success I might add) to get those folks to bury my orange 'temporary' above ground cable since Aug 3rd (almost 4 months ago)! If it stays status quo any longer, that temporary cable won't be considered a temp cable anymore -- it'll be a permanent (albeit ugly) feature snaking across my yard." – *Hamilton*



"I hope it goes without saying how much we appreciate the council vote to prohibit sewer and water extension into the Agricultural Reserve, but thank you anyway!!! I realize this is just one part of many issues still to be resolved but the dialogue from your colleagues regarding their commitment to maintaining the integrity of the Ag Reserve was as important as the vote!" -- *Phyllis*